

SAMPLE MEDIA RELEASE FOR FREE AND REDUCED-PRICE MEALS

(Make appropriate changes as applicable to reflect the programs operated)

This is the public release that we will send to (names of news media outlets and major employers contemplating layoffs) on _____ (date).

(Local school food authority) today announced its policy for providing free and reduced-price meals for children served under the (insert National School Lunch Program, Commodity School Program and/or School Breakfast Program). Each school and/or the central office has a copy of the policy, which may be reviewed by any interested party.

The household size and income criteria will be used to determine eligibility for free and reduced-price benefits. Children from households whose income is at or below the guidelines are eligible for free or reduced-price meals. Children who are members of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) households, Cash Assistance (CA) units or Food Distribution Program on the Indian Reservation (FDPIR) households are automatically eligible for free meals. SNAP/CA families will be certified by the determining official via Direct Certification. Foster children that are the legal responsibility of a welfare agency or court may also be eligible for benefits regardless of the income of the household with whom they reside. Eligibility for the foster child is based on the child's income.

Application forms are being distributed to all households with a letter informing households of the availability of free and reduced-price meals for their children. Applications also are available at the principal's office in each school. To apply for free or reduced-price meals, households must fill out the application and return it to the school. The information households provide on the application will be used for the purpose of determining eligibility and verification of data. Applications may be verified at any time during the school year by school or other program officials.

For school officials to determine eligibility for free and reduced-price benefits, households receiving FDPIR only have to list their child's name, FDPIR case number; an adult household member must sign the application. Households which do not list an FDPIR case number must list the names of all household members, the amount and source of monthly income received by each household member, and the social security number of the adult household member who signs the application. If the household member signing does not have a social security number, he/she must indicate that a social security number is not available. An adult household member must sign the application.

Under the provisions of the free and reduced-price policy (title of determining officials) will review applications and determine eligibility. Parents or guardians dissatisfied with the ruling of the official may wish to discuss the decision with the determining official on an informal basis. Parents wishing to make a formal appeal for a hearing on the decision may make a request either orally or in writing to (name, address, and phone of the hearing official).

If a household member becomes unemployed or if the household size increases, the household should contact the school. Such changes may make the children of the household eligible for benefits if the household's income falls at or below the levels.

Non-discrimination Statement: This explains what to do if you believe you have been treated unfairly. "In accordance with Federal law and U.S. Department of Agriculture policy, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability. To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410 or call (800) 795-3272 or (202) 720-6382 (TTY). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer."